

### **Sola Scriptura – Scripture Alone (Psalm 119:89-105)**

We'll be continuing our series in Philippians next week, but in light of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation that took place Tuesday and in light of these beautiful banners behind me, I want to take this opportunity to preach on the upper left banner behind me that should always be uppermost before us, *sola scriptura*=scripture alone is our ultimate authority. The first Sunday of each month I'll be preaching on these 5 solas these next 5 months, today the 1st banner the others follow from. Next is *sola fide*, faith alone, but faith comes by hearing the Word of God, the scripture. Ps 60:4 (NKJV) *You have given a banner to those who fear You, That it may be displayed because of the truth.* Or NIV: *you have raised a banner to be unfurled...* One translation has '*you have raised a banner...a rallying point in the face of attack*' (NLT).

God gave us a banner to be raised and displayed unfurled because of the truth of scripture alone for salvation and spiritual life. The battle cry of the Reformers 5 centuries ago, *sola scriptura*, is still under attack, and we need to come under it as a rallying point. First and foremost, scripture alone must drive our faith in *sola fide*, scripture defines grace in *sola gratia*, scripture describes Christ in *solus Christus*, it dedicates all to God's glory alone, *Soli Deo Gloria*. Scripture alone is the foundation for all that follows in the great truths we see in these banners. We need to strive to always lift high God's banner of truth, like the iconic image of soldiers raising up a flag in victory.

One paraphrase of Ps 60:4 says '*all who love truth will rally to it.*' Luther's 95-point paper posted 10/31/1517 began similarly: "Out of love for the truth and from desire to elucidate it..." He appealed to the scripture's authority to protest the Catholic practice of indulgences for getting loved ones out of purgatory by paying for this paper from the Pope, all unscriptural concepts (and still practiced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century). Luther's paper was a medieval version of a Facebook post on the Wittenberg university faculty page, open for comments, but others got ahold of it and it went viral in a 1500s sense. Hot off the presses from these newly invented printing presses, a banner was raised for reformation back to scripture alone in the years that followed.

We're not here today to party like it's 1517. I'm not of Luther or Apollos as a party or sect (Luther wrote harshly against Jews, other Reformers wrongly agreed with dealing harshly toward heretics). But praise the Lord He used fallible inconsistent imperfect men (like us) to point us back to the perfect scripture that alone is infallible, unlike us. Men in the 1500s gave their lives to give us this book in our language and freedom so we can keep reforming.

If you would turn in God's Word to Ps 119 I know of no better text to plant the flag for us in the battle for the Bible. The whole chapter holds up for us the authority of scripture alone, a big psalm, 176 verses with one big theme. Don't worry, we'll just read a few verses today, but it's all on *sola scriptura*. Each stanza of 8 verses is an acrostic based on the Hebrew alphabet to give the A-Z of the subject. Scripture alone is for all of life from every possible angle and in every possible situation. Each part highlights the centrality and sufficiency of God's Word. It's in the literal middle of the Bible and we'll be looking at the middle of this psalm, in v. 89, the very centerpiece of this poetic masterpiece showing us why only scripture should be our center and why scripture is settled and sufficient to save us and take us through all life.

Psalm 119:89 *Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.*<sup>90</sup> *Your faithfulness endures to all generations; you have established the earth, and it stands fast.*<sup>91</sup> *By your appointment they stand this day, for all things are your servants.*<sup>92</sup> *If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction.* [Luther's Bible has that written in his own hand.<sup>93</sup> *I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life.*<sup>94</sup> *I am yours; save me* [in the movie called "Luther" that was the passage Luther prayed in his darkest hours], *for I have sought your precepts.*<sup>95</sup> *The wicked lie in wait to destroy me, but I consider your testimonies.*<sup>96</sup> *I have seen a limit to all perfection, but your commandment is exceedingly broad.* [let me read also v. 105] *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*

An old book *The Lantern of Light* is based on v. 105. It 'was the favorite reading of the Lollards before the Reformation... [1400s] Lollards of England and Scotland were charged with reading the Bible in their mother tongue [an English translation, not the Catholic-approved Latin version no one understood, their other crime] esteeming it above any instruction they received from the priests. On this account they were called *Biblemen*. A considerable number were taken up for trial...in 1494... That region, so prominent in the time of the [later] Reformation...had the seed in the soil.<sup>1</sup>

Outline:           What *sola scriptura* does NOT mean  
                           What it DOES mean – and should mean in your life

*Sola scriptura* does **not** mean *solo scriptura*. It's not 'scripture is all you need, so fly solo, no need for others in your life to help you understand and apply scripture.' v. 63 recognizes our need for a community of faith, if you look at v. 63: *I am a companion of all who fear you, of those who keep your precepts.* In the end of Ps 119 the psalmist recognizes he's prone to wander

So are we. Scripture alone doesn't mean 'just be alone with a Bible,' in the sense of a Lone Ranger Christianity. This *sola* isn't encouraging solo faith, disconnected from the church before you or a local church around you, and neither is this psalm. v. 90 recognizes God's faithfulness continued through all generations (believers living before). Like v. 105, light lit their feet, too.

A believer with scripture who's solo, who doesn't care how the faithful prior generations carefully studied and applied it, or content with his own private interpretation even if no one interpreted it that way before, is being reckless, not Reformed. The Reformers saw these 5 solas and historic interpretations of the early church had been lost and needed recovery. And so they tried to reform and restore the church to the faith of the 1st century as understood in the earliest centuries. If they had come up with something completely new, they knew it wouldn't be true. Scripture alone was the lamp for their path, but they knew if they were on the right path of interpretation, they wouldn't be alone in church history. Scripture by God's Spirit would have guided the paths of others whose footprints the Reformers saw while RCC got off path

Augustine: 'I also have not been without some whose footsteps I follow in that which I have maintained. At the same time, as I have said already, it is to the canonical [Genesis to Revelation] Scriptures alone that I am bound to yield such implicit subjection as to follow their teaching...' <sup>12</sup> Augustine over 1,000 years before the Reformation, joined the Latin *sola* and *scriptura* in a phrase to make clear he walked in the paths of other church fathers, but he was bound to submit to and obey the teaching of Scripture alone. Thomas Aquinas, even as a Catholic priest and theologian in the 13th century, used the phrase *sola scriptura canonica* in his comments on John 21 to say 'the canon of scripture alone is the rule of faith.' <sup>13</sup> *Sola scriptura* was a call back

**Sola Scriptura doesn't mean we should reject all teachers or authority**  
v. 99 *does* say a believer can understand more than teachers if he meditates on scripture, but the context of v. 98 may be especially enemies of the faith. v. 100 does say he can be wise beyond his years or beyond the elderly who it implies don't apply scripture. But other scriptures affirm believers need '*shepherds and teachers, to equip*' (Eph 4, for unity, maturity, and stability in community). Heb 13:7: *Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith...* <sup>17</sup> *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Accountability under authority is biblical, and when God's Word is spoken, we're to obey it*

If you want to obey Heb 13:17 here under shepherds who you see as your leaders who you need to watch over your soul, ask us, we want to. We feel a higher accountability to God when members ask us for that accountability as they join, and it helps us fulfill our calling. But we're not to blindly or absolutely obey any man. A team of elders are to lead each local church, to apply scripture in what they decide, members decide to commit and submit.

The Reformers rejected a Pope's absolute authority but not the authority of a plurality of leaders in a local church to make scripture-informed decisions, directions, discipline, and order. They recognized spiritual authority as well as civil authority to be submitted to unless they ask you to violate scripture. We may disagree with decisions of leaders in government or in church or a family but we may not disobey scripture's command to submit to authorities unless they call us to disobey a scriptural command or disregard conscience based on scripture. There is a higher authority we can appeal to above all.

**So what DOES *sola scriptura* mean?** It's not a rejection of authorities that God established in scripture, it's a recognition of the ultimate authority over them, which is scripture alone. Human authorities are not to abuse authority and the best of men are subject to God and His Word as the only authority that can bind man's conscience and demand ultimate obedience in all things. v. 96 is saying even the best or most perfect things we see in this life have a limit, but scriptural commands are exceedingly broad, they apply to all life. v. 102 makes clear there are clear rules in scripture we're not to turn from, and v. 104 also refers to precepts or principles for understanding or wisdom. It doesn't give all information, scripture in v. 105 guides us in its application

The scripture is not a text book of all truth there is, like trigonometry facts or training for specific vocations. John Frame writes: 'We must look outside Scripture if we want specific directions on how to fix a sink or repair a car. But Scripture tells us everything that God wants us to know "concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life" (WCF) ...Scripture doesn't tell us how to repair a car, but it tells us how to glorify God in repairing a car, namely, by doing whatever we do "*in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him*" (Col. 3:17), and by working at it with our hearts "*as working for the Lord...*" (v. 23)... Scripture contains more specific information relevant to theology than to dentistry. But...Scripture contains divine words sufficient for all of life. It has all the divine words that the plumber needs, and...that the theologian needs. So...in that sense, it is sufficient for science and ethics as well.'<sup>4</sup>

2 Pet 1:3–4 says God 'has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us...[Peter adds] he has given us his very great and precious promises...' (NIV). Our knowledge of His calling of us and His promises are in His scripture that alone is sufficient, it's all we need for life and godliness. Everything pertaining to life and being godly in it in every situation has been given to us in His great and precious scripture. Ps 119:72 and v. 162 (NIV) also use those words *great* and *precious* for the promises and precepts of scripture that alone gives all I need for a godly life (in WCF 'either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions'<sup>5</sup>).

*Sola Scriptura! The Protestant Position on the Bible*, sums it up: 'all things necessary for salvation and concerning faith and life are taught in the Bible clearly enough for the ordinary believer to find it there and understand.'<sup>6</sup> 2 Tim 3:17 says all scripture teaches, reproves, corrects, and trains us so we 'may be complete, equipped for every good work.' It can also be translated 'sufficient, and thoroughly furnished,' one version 'having all that is needed.'

It's precisely this point of the sufficiency of scripture alone theologians call the Reformation's formal cause. To this day the *Catholic Catechism* says in paragraph 82: 'the Church...does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.' The RCC Council of Trent,<sup>7</sup> 1546, said God's truth is 'contained in the written books, and the unwritten traditions...Old and the New Testament...as also the said traditions...preserved in the Catholic Church by a continuous succession...if any...deliberately contemn the traditions aforesaid; let him be anathema. Let all therefore understand...authorities it will mainly use in confirming dogma.' Rome says 'scripture *and*,' Reformers 'scripture *alone*' Scripture stands alone. In the NLT of Ps 119 it says twice God's Word is 'my only hope' (v. 43, 49) and 'my heart trembles only at your word' (v. 161).

SBTS president Al Mohler in the new book *God's Word Alone* argues this was the deepest most fundamental driving force of the Reformation, in his words "the affirmation that the Bible alone is the ultimate authority for life and doctrine. Historians refer to sola scriptura as the formal principle of the Reformation, the doctrine that shaped the contours of Reformation conviction... We are those who confess along with the Reformers that when Scripture speaks, God speaks. Scripture alone is the ultimate authority..."

All creeds or confessions are under it. We say 'this I know *for the Bible tells me so.*' We don't sing 'The Virgin Mary helps me, this I know, for *the rosary* tells me so.' The Bible tells me all have sinned except Jesus and He is the only Mediator, so if centuries after the Bible a Pope says Mary was sinless and is co-mediator, I say not! If scripture tells us *not* to bow to statues (Ex 20:4-5), we don't bow to statues even if a bunch of bishops tell us. Since the Word of God says all living Christians are saints (Phil 1:1) and priests (1 Pet 2:9), and that Christ's sacrifice was once for all (Heb. 7:37, 9:38, 10:10), we don't accept church councils saying saints are special dead believers or only certain men are priests re-offering Christ's sacrifice afresh in the Mass. 1 Tim 3 says church leaders are to be the husband of one wife, but the first traditional requirement for Catholic church leaders is they *can't* have a wife.

The only Head of the church, Jesus Christ said in Mt 15: '*you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition...In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men*' (v. 6, 9, quoting Isa 29:13 '*their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote,*' NASB). Isa 8:20 '*To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them*' (NKJV). OT & NT affirm sola scriptura. Deuteronomy 4:2: '*You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God...*' Proverbs 30:6: '*Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you...*' (cf. Rev. 22).

That goes beyond Catholic friends or family, the issue of scripture alone is the foundational issue with cults and their other books or other gospels (not solas). But even some brethren who get the gospel right elevate Charismatic revelations, supposedly receiving additional revelation, as if scripture alone isn't sufficient. Or Christians look to councils of psychology for solutions to spiritual issues scripture speaks to, or let a consensus of a godless scientific community's authority trump what scripture alone said on 6-day creation. There's church leaders who openly let culture drive how they do church in the name of being missional, not letting scripture alone regulate worship. Or maybe you're one who sets aside scripture for your feelings, selfishness, sin.

Carson wrote last week 'Scripture alone is adequate to confront...narcissism, worldwide consumerism, and rampant individualism in some cultures and enchaining social conformity in others, the residue of theoretical Marxism that still promises freedom but everywhere leaves people in chains, the many faces of resurgent [Islamic terrorism], the vast appeal of Buddhism and Hinduism, growing militant atheism... sheer lostness. Sola scriptura.'<sup>8</sup>

### What should this *sola* mean personally? 1. Let scripture stand above all

Ps 119:89 says forever God's Word is fixed, or several versions say '*settled in heaven.*' It's firm, it's settled, nothing from earth can add to it. If God said it, that settles it, period! God's Word has proved faithful for all generations as v. 90 says. And as v. 91 adds, it still stands. So we sing we trust God's Word alone, 'our traditions shift like sand, while His Truth forever stands.'<sup>9</sup> 'Words of power, strong to save, that will never pass away, I will stand on every promise of your word, for your covenant is sure, on this I'm secure.'<sup>10</sup> Even the Apostle teaching was to be tested by scripture alone (Acts 17:11), even an angel's word (Gal 1:8), even the Lord's authority was '*It is written.*' How much more must we learn to '*not go beyond what is written,*' 1 Cor 4:7

**2. Look to scripture above all.** The next verse says: <sup>93</sup> *I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life.* <sup>94</sup> *I am yours; save me, for I have sought your precepts.* If you need to be saved, look to scripture to see the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us. Look to the Lord who inspired Ps 119, the One God's Law, prophets, and Psalms pointed to. Jesus gives life by His Word. He kept God's precepts for us, even when like v. 95 says, sinful men waited to kill Him, He died for sin, including yours, if you will but see His Lordship and ownership of you saying *I am yours, save me.*

If you're saved but need to be revived spiritually in your struggling, look to scripture like v. 107 in NKJV '*I am afflicted very much; Revive me, O LORD, according to Your word.*' 11x in that translation it speaks of revival by the Word of God. Our closing hymn is very along those lines 'Revive us Again.' We don't need a big tent for revival, we need biblical truth. Don't think of revivalism emotionalism or experiences, revive your time in God's Word. Don't say 'God said/told me,' unless it's what His Word said and told you. We don't need visions or voices, scripture is His voice and His vision for us

**3. Love scripture above all.** <sup>97</sup> *Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day...* <sup>103</sup> *How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!* May God help us to apply this to reform and transform hearts

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<sup>1</sup> John Ker, *The Psalms in History and Biography*, p. 148.

<sup>2</sup> *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, p. 358, Letter 82.3.24.

<sup>3</sup> William Webster, *Holy Scripture: The Ground and Pillar of Our Faith*, volume 2, page 87-88.

<sup>4</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 612-13.

<sup>5</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1646, section 1.6.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Godfrey, "What Do We Mean By Sola Scriptura?" in *Sola Scriptura* (Soli Deo Gloria publications, 1996), p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.thecounciloftrent.com/ch4.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Carson, "Sola Scriptura," The Gospel Coalition Blog.

<sup>9</sup> Bob Kauflin, "Reformation Hymn," 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Getty Music, "Every Promise of Your Word."